

The web of English curriculum development

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The Web of English Curriculum Development

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筑波大学外国語センター

研究代表者 アンドリュー・バーフィールド

The Web of English Curriculum Development

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Developing Integrated English Language Systems

Project No.: 084551097

Project members (1996-99)

Andrew BARFIELD, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba

Hiroko AYABE, Foreign Language Center, Institute of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of
Tsukuba

Akiko KAWASAKI, Foreign Language Center, Institute of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of
Tsukuba

Akira KUBOTA, Foreign Language Center, Institute of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of
Tsukuba

Hirosada IWASAKI, Foreign Language Center, Institute of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of
Tsukuba

Yvonne STAPP, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba

Project members (1996-98)

Joseph JOHNSON, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba

Akinobu OKUMA, Foreign Language Center, Institute of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of
Tsukuba

William PLAIN, Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (from April 1998)

John SHILLAW, International Baccalaureate Organisation, Wales (from July 1998)

Project member (1996-97)

Shosuke HARAGUCHI, Foreign Language Center, Institute of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of
Tsukuba

Project member in original proposal (December 1995)

John LANDER, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba (until March 1996)

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研究組織(1996-99)

研究代表者： アンドリュー・バーフィールド（筑波大学外国語センター外国人教師）

研究分担者： 綾部裕子（筑波大学現代語・現代文化学系教授）

研究分担者： 川崎晶子（筑波大学現代語・現代文化学系助教授）

研究分担者： 久保田章（筑波大学現代語・現代文化学系助教授）

研究分担者： 磐崎弘貞（筑波大学現代語・現代文化学系助教授）

研究分担者： イボンス・スタッフ（筑波大学外国語センター外国人教師）

研究組織(1996-98)

研究分担者： ウィリアム・ブレイン（名古屋外国語大学外国語学部教授、1998年4月より）

研究分担者： 大熊昭信（筑波大学現代語・現代文化学系教授）

研究分担者： ジョン・ショー（International Baccalaureate Organisation、1998年7月より）

研究分担者： ジョセフ・ジョンソン（筑波大学外国語センター外国人教師）

研究組織(1996-97)

研究分担者： 原口庄輔（筑波大学現代語・現代文化学系教授）

研究組織（申請時 1995）

研究分担者： ジョン・ランダー（筑波大学外国語センター外国人教師、1996年3月まで）

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1. University-based Perspectives on English Curriculum Development（1998年3月）

（大学レベルの英語カリキュラム開発の展望）

2. The Web of English Curriculum Development（1999年8月）

（英語カリキュラム開発網）

By way of introduction...

Following on from a first anthology of working papers entitled *University-based Perspectives on English Curriculum Development* (March, 1998), the papers published with this volume comprise the final official act in a three-year project funded by the Ministry of Education. This project bears the name *Developing Integrated English Language Education Systems*, and was conceived as a comprehensive approach to investigating and exploring university English education in order to find better ways to prepare students for the world of tomorrow—a world in which individuals and societies will face increasing challenges to survive, co-operate and achieve sustainable development.

The project's conceptual focus consisted of exploring how such citizens of tomorrow might best benefit from English language education today. How can English language education at the university help prepare students to be critically thinking, co-operatively oriented, technologically adept citizens, with an internationally-minded global awareness? What potential developments in the English curriculum might underpin this?

To find possible answers to these wide-ranging questions, *Developing Integrated English Language Education Systems* was originally planned as an umbrella project with five specific support projects: Educational Technology, Vocabulary-based Materials, Evaluation & Testing Development, Content-based Materials Development, and Teacher Training and Development. Though the sub-projects were designed to function independently of each other, one central tenet of the design was that these different sub-projects feed back into each other, as well as into the umbrella project itself. This conceptual interdependence is highlighted in the diagram below, as well as in the table on the next page, where a complete and detailed overview of the aims and goals of each sub-project is given.

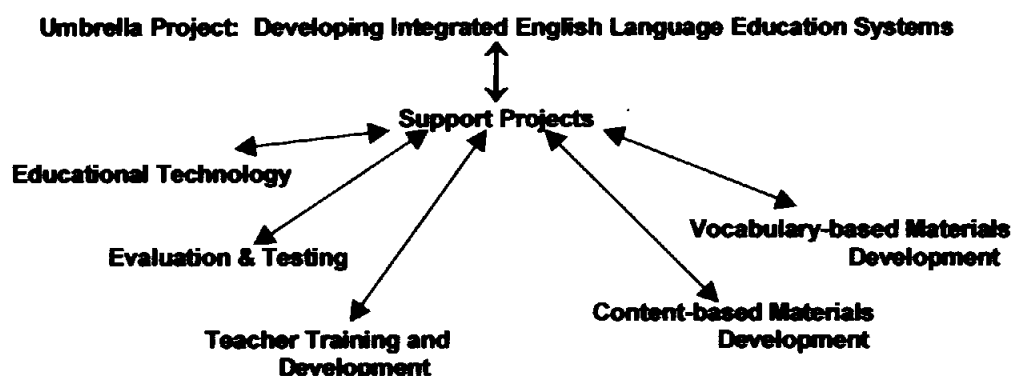


Table 1
The web of research goals and aims

1. Research Method: Educational Technology Support Project		
1996	A	To establish communication via electronic mail (e-mail) between Tsukuba students and students in other countries (for reading/writing practice) To establish a local e-mail network between English students and project instructors To establish Internet and World Wide Web routines for student communication and research projects in order to locate, retrieve and use information from international resources
	B	To explore how learners may use technology by organising a small-scale multi-media self-access workstation
	C	To create a database of video texts according to genre (film, documentary, news, for example) using digital editing tools
1997-8	A, B, C	To review qualitatively communicative progress made To establish appropriate learning modules for e-mail / self-access To evaluate qualitatively communicative progress made
2. Research Method: Vocabulary-based Materials Development Support Project		
1996	A, B	To establish a large database of typical language that learners meet in different courses (speaking, reading, writing, listening)
1997-8	A, B	To concordance the database: (i) to establish basic lexical information for teachers and learners and (ii) to develop guidelines for materials development and classroom teaching
3. Research Method: Content-based Materials Development Support Project		
1996	A	To establish a large database of global-issues related texts (written, audio, video)
	B	To describe different classroom methods and tasks for global education
1997-8	A, B	To analyse the text database and create trial materials To trial materials, method and tasks in the classroom To review the classroom research To establish appropriate teaching and learning guidelines
4. Research Method: Evaluation and Testing Support Project		
1996	A	To relate university-internal assessment instruments (placement and proficiency tests) to existing established external tests of proficiency
1997-8	A	To relate and analyse university-internal assessment instruments to changes in the curriculum
5. Research Method: In-Service Teacher Training and Development Support Project		
1996-8	A	To expand in depth and range the ongoing curriculum consultations with teachers of English at the university To interview record and transcribe teachers analysing their own teaching To analyse the processes, problems and limits that teachers identify in improving their teaching
1997-8	A	To establish appropriate teacher training and development procedures and modules for university language instructors.

Within such a framework of goals, no single research method was prioritised, such that the project teams undertook their classroom research through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. It was rather intended that new and unexpected connections between different areas of research would gradually emerge as project members networked their research through discussion, presentation and writing.

An important first step in this direction was taken when full-time and part-time staff of the Foreign Language Center English Section participated in a one-day

workshop meeting in November 1996 entitled *Curriculum Development: Classroom Realities and Possibilities*. With a strong emphasis on practical classroom methods and research, this meeting featured various workshops both by project members (Ayabe, Barfield, Iwasaki, Kawasaki, Plain and Stapp), as well as by colleague part-time English teachers (Ikeguchi, Juppé and Roche-Nishimori). That 1996 set of workshops acted as an initial springboard for project members to develop their explorations further.

Within the English section at the Foreign Language Center, through the second year of the project, different team members also gave short presentations on their areas of interest (Barfield, Kawasaki, Plain, Shillaw and Stapp) or worked co-operatively in small groups to discuss in depth their emerging research (Ayabe and Kawasaki). Such work continued into the third year of the project (Ayabe, Barfield, Iwasaki, Kawasaki, Kubota and Stapp). Project members also gave presentations at both regional and international conferences on related themes (Barfield, Iwasaki, Kubota and Stapp). All these efforts at presenting, discussing and explaining classroom research, goals and concerns directly fed into the first set of working papers, mentioned at the start of this introduction, as well as into this present volume.

Designed as a means to make more explicit the diverse implicit connections between the five sub-projects, the project's two volumes of papers have also been intended as a practical benefit for the wider English language teaching community within the University of Tsukuba itself—and further beyond, for teachers in other educational institutions. Some of these connections in particular deserve to be highlighted by way of introduction.

First, within these two volumes (1998 & 1999), while the whole range of language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) as taught in the present first-year English curriculum is covered, great emphasis is also placed by different authors on the heightened interplay of language skills that an integrated curriculum of English requires. At the same time, three new sets of skills emerge as central to such a changed curriculum: learning skills, critical thinking skills and computer literacy skills.

Such an integration of skills is emphasised by Yvonne Stapp (1998 & 1999) where she explores the possibilities offered by the use of the Internet and multi-media for developing reading skills and critical thinking skills for science and sports students. Akiko Kawasaki (1999) also describes the use of the Internet for developing critical thinking skills for English communication practice with a Social Engineering class, while Andrew Barfield (1999) examines how student project work on global issues, with both

Bio-Resources and Humanities students, requires a problematization of different language skills and learning tasks. Furthermore, both Barfield (1998) and John Shillaw (1999) explore ways in which to move reading away from the grammar translation of a limited body of texts towards students reading extensively massive amounts of graded English: Shillaw reports on his work with Natural Science students and Humanities majors; in contrast, Barfield investigates such an approach with Art and Design and Medical Science students.

This move away from discrete language skills can also be seen to accompany a shift from discrete-item grammar and vocabulary learning towards viewing language more in terms of lexical chunking, collocation and discourse organisation. Here, Hirosada Iwasaki's research into collocation and paraphrasing (1998, 1999) is of particular interest, as is also John Shillaw's on vocabulary recording and development (Shillaw, 1999). Connected to those findings and observations is the investigation by Hiroko Ayabe (1998) and Akiko Kawasaki (1998) of how skilled listeners differ from less skilled listeners in their ability to process language holophrastically. This exploration in turn connects to the emergence of a greater emphasis on key English study skills such as note-taking (Kawasaki, 1998; Barfield, 1999) and strategic reading (Barfield, 1998 & 1999; Stapp, 1998 & 1999).

Other important highlighted themes feature both a concern with developing the traditional classroom into a learner-centred, content-based environment where co-operative learning is a fundamental motivating process (William Plain, 1998), and a focus on changing our understanding of learning away from passive reception of English language education towards that of students co-learning and using English to research their immediate and virtual worlds (Stapp, 1998; Barfield, 1999; Kawasaki, 1999). In this latter respect, although the Internet may be seen as the content-based medium *par excellence* for students to work with, the actual use and development of Internet and multi-media by teachers raises various technological, maintenance and budgetary problems. Joseph Johnson (1999) highlights these issues in a very practical manner by focusing on the difficulties of latching the educational use of computer technology on top of a system originally geared to communicating by e-mail and to running specialised programs. Johnson also considers the challenge of setting up and administering new computer systems.

Making best use of existing knowledge and research is a strong feature of John Shillaw's inquiry into assessing vocabulary gains by using the University of Tsukuba

English placement and proficiency tests as a stable baseline for relating classroom research to overall assessment of progress. Shillaw's work shows how the *eigo no kentei shiken* project of previous years can now yield integrated benefits for teachers engaged in classroom research and curriculum development. Finally, while both volumes of papers interweave integration and development into a rich tapestry of emergent curricular trends, two papers in particular thread together a broader educational picture. On the hand, the culture of constraints on teacher development and research within a university context is questioned by Barfield (1999), while Hiroko Ayabe (1999) takes an intercultural look at the way students from different cultural backgrounds construct distinct new and often unexpected identities for themselves.

Yet, who are these students of today? Through this project, a complex and fascinating profile begins to emerge. Forward looking and ever more ready to use technology as a learning tool and educational medium, the students of today are aware that they need to develop and apply their knowledge of the world—locally, globally and virtually. They are more and more pushing towards multi-disciplinary study and towards autonomous ways of thinking, living and learning. This generation wants to learn how to learn, think and act better, for they are critically minded towards a world in crisis. How might English language education cater better to their diverse and dynamic needs?

Perhaps the single biggest implicit lesson emerging from this project is the very central need to respect rather than dismiss or undervalue what today's students are claiming now as part of their future. Today's students ask to be involved in constructing their own education: As part of their educational right, they want to learn flexible and adaptable ways of thinking and acting through an English language education similarly adaptable and flexible. In short, the citizens of tomorrow are claiming an equal say in the multiple dialogues about their own education. The same can be said of the picture that emerges from these papers of the English teachers of today and tomorrow: They also want and need to be flexible and adaptable, as well as sensitive and responsive to the changing needs of the people they teach and learn together with.

It is thus around this very partnership for learning for life that this project weaves its web of meanings towards, it is hoped, the emergence of better appropriate pedagogy and integration in English language education at the University of Tsukuba.

Andrew Barfield, Project Leader,
Tsukuba, August 1999